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ABSTRACT

A case study is presented that details the English learning experiences of Mashud, a Bangladeshi boy who emigrated to England. Although Mashud was fluent and skilled in his native Sylheti language, he had a great deal of difficulty learning English. He attempted to spell phonetically and showed little understanding of grammar or punctuation. In writing assignments, Mashud consistently produced formulaic moral tales. Mashud's teacher hypothesized that Sylheti, as an oral language, had emphasized learning moral lessons and formulaic repetition of information rather than creative writing skills. Instead of discouraging his Sylheti-based linguistic attempts, the teacher employed individualized discourse and autobiographical writing tasks to expand Mashud's English knowledge and writing ability. Mashud showed marked improvement in these areas, illustrating the importance of individualized, whole-language approaches to educating bilingual students. (JL)

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Center for the Study of Writing

Occasional Paper No. 15

A WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF BILINGUAL LEARNERS

Alex Moore

January, 1990

University of California, Berkeley
Carnegie Mellon University

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A WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF BILINGUAL LEARNERS

by

Alex Moore
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In the Autumn of 1987, I found myself privileged to work with the two people whom this essay is really about: a London school teacher called Susan and a fifteen-year-old Bangladeshi boy called Mashud.

Mashud had been in England for eighteen months. His first language was Sylheti, for which there exists no standard written form, but he was also able to speak and write fluently in Bengali, which had been the language of instruction of his Bangladeshi schools. His English secondary school, where he was now in the fourth year, had large numbers of bilingual pupils of whom Sylhetis made up the largest single group: as many as fifty per cent in some classes.

During his time so far at the school, Mashud had made unspectacular progress in English, despite having received a good deal of out-of-class language tutoring as well as some in-class language support, in both cases by qualified and capable ESL teachers. His handwriting still bore strong traces of the Bengali script, which made it difficult to read; he still attempted to spell many words and combinations of words—often misheard in the first instance—by a patchily-successful strategy of phonetics; his attempts at replicating English grammatical structures were developing rather slowly; and he had little knowledge of the functions of punctuation. (These were the aspects of his writing that teachers tended to wring their hands over.) He did, however, write copiously and enthusiastically, if, as we shall see, not yet with any variety, and in this respect his written work was more impressive than his oral work. (Mashud seemed confident enough, indeed displayed leadership qualities in conversation with his Sylheti-speaking peers, but appeared reluctant to expose himself to possible embarrassment and public correction by using spoken English with his teachers or his non-Sylheti-speaking classmates.) In his English class, there were twenty-six other students, of whom nine were also Sylheti speakers with less than two years' experience of living in England.

Susan was one of Mashud's two English teachers. I was the other. Two teachers—one an ESL specialist, the other a regular English teacher—had been assigned to each fourth-year English class on account of the large numbers of bilingual pupils at the school. However, there had been an insufficient number of ESL teachers to go around and therefore one class had been obliged to share two English specialists. This was the class Susan and I had been given: both of us

were regular English teachers, but both of us had a great deal of experience under our belt of working with bilingual children in the same part of England.

This particular expedition into the realms of collaborative teaching was new to the school, and replaced an earlier system whereby fourth and fifth year pupils were given "decontextualized" language work by ESL teachers through having their option subjects (only Math, English and Games were at that time compulsory) reduced from five per week to four per week. The teachers involved in the project, of whom Susan and I were but two of a dozen, had been carefully selected according to two broad sets of criteria by the heads of the school's English and ESL departments. First, they had to believe in and enjoy collaborative teaching. Second, they needed to be on common philosophical and theoretical ground. Eschewing the kind of English teaching many of them had cut their teeth on in the 'sixties and early 'seventies, with its emphases on comprehension exercises, essay titles, spelling tests, class readers and whole-class lessons in grammar and punctuation, their focus would now be on the form and content of various written and spoken genres, on language awareness, and on working with what children brought into the classroom with them: in particular, accepting the responsibility to provide instruction that was both appropriate and challenging, without slavishly following preordained schemes of work. (They would have to cope with one major constraint, however, in being obliged to follow the dictates of a public examination syllabus.) Their methodology would owe much to the work of Barnes, their theory to the work of Vygotsky (in respect of the relationship between development and instruction) and of Foucault, Bakhtin, and Volosinov (in respect of the philosophy of language and particularly the nature and functions of discourse). They would, in consequence of these influences, be advocators and practitioners of whole language teaching: that is to say, they would seek (to borrow from Kenneth Goodman's definition) to "create opportunities for pupils to use language in authentic, richly contextualized, functional ways."

As far as the teaching of bilingual pupils was concerned, this approach would be essentially no different from the teaching of monolingual pupils in most respects. It would, however, highlight certain attitudes and strategies. In particular, it would entail a rejection of oversimplified divisions of language into the "social" and the "academic" (divisions which had been used to support the argument for providing bilingual learners with decontextualized language work under the previous system), in favor of models based on a perceived need for such pupils to acquire expertise in a wide range of Western discursive practices, both written and oral, some of which might be at odds with alternative practices already learnt in previous (usually Bangladeshi) schools. While initiating pupils into these new discursive practices, it would be essential to oppose any downgrading or devaluing of alternative practices, that might in turn lead to pupils' abandoning or rejecting their own "home culture" either in part or in whole. In short, those same underlying views that underpinned these teachers' work with native English-speaking children, with its emphases on contextualization, on collaboration, and on a resistance to language differentiation (in particular, to the teaching of "discrete"

language skills), would also be brought to bear on the teaching of their bilingual pupils. The intriguing question was: how would this actually work in practice? And what specific pedagogical skills would be needed to make sure that it *did* happen?

Before the start of the academic year, Susan and I, having been asked if we would like to work together, had sat down and agreed on our respective roles vis a vis Mashud's class. For timetabling purposes, one teacher (myself in this case) had been designated subject-teacher, and the other (Susan) support-teacher. (We had also been invited to work together with another fourth-year class containing far fewer bilingual pupils, where our roles were reversed.) In practice, we decided that we would not take these labels too seriously: we would share on as equitable a basis as possible all lesson planning, marking, and preparation, and we agreed that both of us would help all pupils, both bilingual and monolingual. A timetabling problem, however, had meant that Susan was only able to attend three out of every four of our weekly lessons with this class: therefore it was agreed that I would assume ultimate overall responsibility for one major area of organization—that of classroom discipline.

We had both quickly picked out Mashud as a particularly interesting and promising pupil. In addition to his oral reticence (in English) and copious flaws at the surface level of his written work (characteristics shared by most of the other Sylheti children in the class), Mashud's work had a particular idiosyncrasy in that whenever he was set creative writing—or even discursive writing—assignments, he would come up with heavily formulaic fairy-story-style moral tales which were clearly translations of stories he had learned, almost by rote, in his native tongue. (Other assignments, such as responses to works of literature, he would never attempt.) This was not a unique phenomenon—many of the Sylheti children at the school sometimes produced similar work in response to similar assignments—but the fact that Mashud was such a productive student, and the fact that he never varied his approach, had thrown this idiosyncracy into particularly sharp focus.

It was a habit that had already been noted by Mashud's English teacher of the previous year; but it was Susan who formulated a first attempt to account for it, at one of our weekly meetings about half way into the Autumn term:

> Mashud seems to have a background where making up stories is not so highly valued . . . not nearly as much as learning moral tales. I suppose that could have something to do with his culture . . . you know, if it's more strongly oral-based than our own . . . or even with the sorts of dangers in Bangladesh, which are maybe more predictable, and located more in the natural environment than they are here: you know, a lot of his stories are to do with snakes and flooding rivers and poisoning . . . and maybe certain social issues are more clear-cut. I don't know . . . I don't know enough about it, really . . . Here, on the other hand, making up your own stories and writing them down is a very highly valued

activity. I don't think Mashud has quite made that transition yet . . . You know, he's still operating mentally in one culture and sometimes linguistically in another . . . If that makes any sort of sense!

Susan's claim not to "know enough" about this issue was a refreshingly honest one. However, she clearly did know enough not to dismiss Mashud's habit as a "problem" of cognitive-linguistic origin, or to attribute it, as many teachers would have done, to a vague, deficit-model-inspired notion of "unsureness" or "insecurity." She had asked herself questions about Mashud's cultural-linguistic background—questions which nobody had invited her to ask—and come to a perfectly tenable hypothesis on which she—and I—could structure future pedagogy. That pedagogy itself would offer us every opportunity to test out Susan's hypothesis. In effect, Susan had sought to explain a phenomenon rather than merely describe it. This, I now realized, was a necessary first step towards the kind of understanding we would subsequently need if we were to develop and improve our teaching not just of Mashud but of all the pupils in all our classes: an obvious point, perhaps, but one that gets all too easily lost in the hurly-burly of coping and survival strategies that carries many teachers through the working day.

Susan's attempt at a rational, non-deficit explanation of Mashud's written work was to prove important in all sorts of ways: chiefly, in that it created a questioning, sympathetic discourse which enabled other, related (and often more focused) issues to be recognized, discussed, and approached in a manner far more planned and informed than we had hitherto attempted. At a subsequent weekly meeting, the question of Mashud's "essentially oral" Bangladeshi culture resurfaced, this time finding its focus in the *structure* of his narrative work. I had been re-reading Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, and told Susan that I'd been reminded of her comments at our earlier meeting:

AM: I wonder, you know, if you're remembering stories for repetition, if you're likely to *order* them in a particular way: also, to cut out . . . not adjectives per se; they could have an important function . . . but—a lot of what we would call "background detail."

S: All that description, and "characterization" and stuff . . . Yes . . . I suppose you could be right. It would in a sense be irrelevant, wouldn't it. I mean, the moral would be the important thing . . . not what kind of day it was, less still what mood people were in, what was going on inside their heads . . . None of that so-called realism or naturalism that we're so into . . . That could all just be so much clutter . . .

AM: Yes . . . Yes, I think so . . . So perhaps the things we value in our culture in respect of writing—like, as you say, so-called realism—could be thought of . . . well, as bad, actually, in a culture that was less literacy-oriented . . . And things like "style" . . .

S: Yes . . . You'd tell the story or whatever chronologically: that would be the tendency.

AM: Right . . . and it might involve fewer characters . . .

S: It's fascinating. When you think about it, there could be the most enormous gap between what Mashud has been brought up to value in narratives and what we're telling him he should be valuing.

AM: That's right. Always assuming, of course, that our basic hypothesis is correct!

This particular session was to prove every bit as useful as the earlier one. During the course of our next lesson with Mashud, Susan and I started to look very carefully at the structure of his stories to see if they actually did have the essentially additive structure one might associate with a more oral culture, rather than the subordinate style favored by our own society. (We decided they did.) At the same time, we began to re-identify our task and strategy vis a vis Mashud and the other Bangladeshi children in the class, away from working mainly on surface-features and "fine tuning" towards initiating them into the kinds of spoken and (particularly) written discourse that they would need expertise in if they were to do well in English society: a change of perspective, in fact, but with the same educational goal in mind. This initiation—or rather, these initiations—would have to be effected without any devaluation of the kinds of discourse these pupils were already proficient in (for instance, the retelling of moral tales), or suggesting that ours was the "right" way of doing things, theirs the "wrong."

With these new strategies in mind, we decided to effect a slight restructuring of our teaching program for the middle section of the Autumn term. Two weeks into the term, we had already introduced an autobiography project. Our reason for introducing this project as this stage was that our fourth-year class was participating in a writing exchange with a school in the United States of America. (The project, which entailed our pupils exchanging samples of their writing with a parallel class of American pupils and which had an important impact on Mashud's writing, will be returned to later.) It seemed safe to assume that our pupils would want to begin this exchange by sending off data about themselves and receiving similar data from their American counterparts: autobiography writing seemed an obvious and appealing way of doing this, just as the situation—being able to write for a "real" audience of unseen peers—suggested our pupils might be inspired to write fuller, more entertaining pieces than if they had only been undertaking the exercise as another component of their examination course (albeit one that would receive an audience within the school itself).

We had initiated the project by introducing the class to extracts of autobiographies and pseudo-autobiographies written in a variety of styles—Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, James Joyce's *Portrait of*

the Artist, and so on—essentially to indicate the importance of "voice" and to remind our pupils that they could work within a range of available styles. A sheet of suggested but not prescriptive chapter headings had then been handed out—Babyhood, Primary School Days, Accidents, etc.—which could be selected from on a chronological or any other basis or passed over in favor of any alternative structure. During two subsequent lessons of class discussion, memories had been exchanged and discussed to get pupils "in the mood." The Bangladeshi children had not joined in these discussions formally, though there had been much informal discussion, in Sylheti, amongst themselves. The whole-class discussions, as well as the worksheets (there being neither the time nor the expertise for translations), had been in English. Though the project had been carefully introduced, it had not replaced other projects. Unlike other projects, which normally had a production-limit of two to three weeks and took up all the pupils' time, the autobiographical work would be spread over two to three months, being undertaken concurrently with other work. Much of the responsibility for organizing this project would therefore be devolved on to the pupils.

Both Susan and I had noted that the Bangladeshi pupils had been particularly slow to get the project started—partly, we thought, because letters to parents explaining the writing exchange itself had not been available in Bengali and we had not explained carefully enough how their work would be disseminated. (An additional problem was that they had clearly been confused by our sheet of suggested chapter headings.) Our new strategy would be to focus on the autobiography with these pupils, releasing them from other projects, emphasizing the potential audience of American peers, and initiating work through oral discussion of their own and their families' life-histories. We were helped in this by having now developed a concept and a plan of our own. We felt that by introducing an autobiography project to Mashud and the other Sylheti pupils, we would be providing a gentle introduction into one particular set of Western European ways of writing: that is to say, expressive writing. Our broad strategy would, we hoped, enable a pupil like Mashud to write from his own experience while at the same time incorporating elements of moral tales into his writing in ways that seemed appropriate to him. (These elements would be "selective" in character: that is to say, true episodes would be chosen on the basis of their capacity to make a moral point.) Being invited to write about his life in Bangladesh, in whatever way came most easily to him, would combine freedom and originality (to choose from a range of possible experiences and details) with conformity and restriction (in this case, whatever he wrote about must be true): the basic paradigm, we felt, within which all Western expressive/"creative" writing was located. He would not be expected to become an inventive storyteller overnight, but, while not being denied those storytelling abilities he already possessed, he would be given every opportunity of extending existing skills and incorporating them with new ones in an area that was not quite fiction but that had many of the qualities of fiction.

The new skills we expected from Mashud included subordination and drafting (previously, he had produced second drafts of stories at his teachers' request, but these had amounted to no more than neat copyings-out of teacher-corrected originals); the description of unique events; the reporting of conversations; and the introduction of characters, feelings, and motives into his writing. If responded to appropriately by us, Mashud would, we hoped, come to learn something of what was valued in expressive writing in his new school, and how that was different from what he may have learned to value in previous ones.

Since Susan had shown a particular interest in Mashud and had developed a closer working relationship with him at this stage, it seemed not surprising that she should spend more time with him on the project than I did. This was not something we discussed or set up formally: it was just the way things fell out. I did not ignore Mashud, of course, and regularly went over to see what he was doing, both on his own and in his discussions with Susan.

Some examples of his initial approach to the task, and of Susan's responses to it, are reproduced in the following extracts taken from transcripts of discussions between Mashud and Susan after he had come up with a scribbled first draft of his project, which he had entitled "My Life Story." Susan had decided to use these sessions both to correct surface and vocabulary errors in Mashud's work and to discuss its content with him. In particular, she wanted to encourage him to extend the length of his assignment, which was longer than anything he had previously written—a little under a thousand words—but still seemed on the short side considering the nature of the project and the wealth of experience he had to draw on. During the course of these early sessions, Mashud at least twice to my knowledge thought of new material for subsequent inclusion: something he had never been obliged to do in the transcription of his moral tales.

Discussion between Susan and Mashud of part of Mashud's first draft describing his birth at the time of the Bangladesh War:

S: So who was the War between?

M: Miss, Bangladesh War.

S: Yes . . . but . . . who was fighting? Were Bangladeshi people fighting other Bangladeshi people?

M: No . . . No Bangladesh people . . . Er . . . No Bangladesh . . . Er . . . Pakistan . . . Pakistan people fight . . . And . . . Bangladesh East Pakistan.

S: Oh yes. Bangladesh was East Pakistan.

M: Yes, Miss.

S: Now it's Bangladesh.

M: Miss.

Discussion between Susan and Mashud of part of Mashud's first draft describing being chased by a "cow":

S: Tell me about this cow.

M: Miss (laughing) cow hit me.

S: It hit you?

M: Yes, Miss.

S: Like this? (Raising hand and aiming an imaginary swipe.)

M: (Laughing) Miss! Like this. (Putting fingers to head like horns and using them to "butt" the boy next to him, who, listening, also laughs.) In the lands . . .

S: The lands? What are the lands?

M: Where is cow, Miss. Four cows in our lands my family.

S: Lands . . . I think we would say "fields." So you had four cows in your field?

M: Field?

S: (Writing it down on Mashud's paper) Field.

M: Four cows, Miss. (Laughing) One cow . . . bad; very, very bad.

S: It chased you.

M: (Excited) Chase! Yes, Miss. I very scared . . .

S: And it hit you?

M: Yes, Miss. Bad . . . very, very bad.

Discussion between Susan and Mashud of part of Mashud's first draft describing an injury sustained in a wrestling contest with another boy:

S: You *broke* your leg, you say?

M: Yes, Miss.

S: Or did you *hurt* it?

M: Hurt, yes.

S: I see. So you did not actually *break* it.

M: Yes, break Miss. (Gestures breaking with two fists.)

S: Wow! That must have hurt!

M: Yes, Miss.

S: Which bit of your leg was it you broke?

M: Miss?

S: (Pointing to Mashud's leg) Where? Here? (Indicating his shin) Here? (Indicating his ankle)

M: Yes, here.

S: On your *ankle*.

M: Uncle . . .

S: A—(Writing) Ankle.

M: Ankle. Break my ankle, Miss?

S: Right.

Clearly, these conversations were not ideal from a learning viewpoint. Partly because of tradition, partly because of Mashud's lack of confidence and expertise in spoken English, they fell broadly into the discursive pattern Teacher Initiates (in this case, Questions)—Pupil Responds. However, there were other characteristics that had impressed me and that had plainly not happened just by chance. To begin with, Susan had not fallen into the trap, described by Morgan Dalphinis, of questioning her pupil's reality ("This doesn't sound true? . . . Would it really have happened like this?" and so on): rather, her aim had been to discover more of what that reality was, and to teach useful new vocabulary at the same time which would be of use to Mashud when he wished or needed to express that same reality in the future. (It is interesting that Mashud never needed to be "taught" the word

"ankle" again, and never subsequently confused it with "uncle." I am tempted to draw a comparison with "Parts of the Body" sessions I have observed in other classes, where bilingual pupils are presented with labelled diagrams of people and must practice drills in order to acquire basic vocabulary of the human anatomy. At the end of such lessons, many pupils find themselves more confused than when they began.)

Susan's questions had also been *genuine* questions, designed to elicit information: not disguised statements or judgments as is so often the case in these situations. They had focused Mashud's attention on what he was writing, and had led him to consider further, related material. While Susan had made abundant surface-corrections to Mashud's work, she had made no effort yet to get him to add or delete anything, but had merely made the suggestion that "Ramadan sounds very interesting; you must tell me about that some time."

When Mashud had finished his second draft, using the work "corrected" by Susan along with some more he had added (including a section on Ramadan), he showed it again to Susan, who first made surface-feature corrections of the added material and then offered her opinion of the work as a whole:

S: Good. That's very good work, Mashud.

M: No, Miss. Short—too short.

S: Well . . . Perhaps you can add a bit? What else do you think you could write about? Let's have a look at what you've got so far.

Together, Susan and Mashud now reexamined Mashud's project so far, Susan sitting beside Mashud reading while he followed:

S: (Reading)

My Life Story, by Mashud.

I was born in Bangladesh in war-time. The war started in 1971, the year of my birth. Before that, Bangladesh was East Pakistan. Then they had a big war and Pakistan spread into three parts. One is India, another Bangladesh and Pakistan—I don't really know much about it because I was just born at that time. My mum told me about it.

Sometimes I think I can remember things I did, things I saw from the age of eleven, but I don't think I can remember things before that. My mum and dad told me they had a small house in a small village between the jungles. When the war began, everybody went to the jungle to save their lives. People took food with them and a map and a torch for light, because in those days we didn't have electricity in Bangladesh.

People who used to live at the top of a hill or between the fields had to dig a hole that they could hide inside and save their own and their children's lives. My parents said they used to live on the hillside and they dug a hole and hid in it, covering it over with some branches and leaves. My grandfather heard that we were in trouble. He used to live in another village, quite far away. He was so worried that he came looking for my parents, but he never saw anybody. He was shouting and looking for them. The Military were not far away. They heard him calling, and they came and one of them shot him. After about an hour my parents came out and someone told my dad that his dad was dead. He was shocked. It was that night that I was born.

My dad told me they had gone to look for a doctor. Also, I was lucky to be born that night because the Military had gone on to another village.

When I was about ten years old we had some farms, and every family who had a farm if they couldn't look after it by themselves they got another person as a paid help, usually someone very poor.

We had four cows. One day school was closed and I was looking after the cows, suddenly, someone came up behind me and showed a piece of red cloth to the cow. The cow started chasing me. I was running. The cow pushed me with its horns and I went rolling down the hill. I was shocked and hurt in my chest. It took me months to get well.

But in Bangladesh it's lots of fun with your friends. Every morning, we go to the swimming pool with a lot of friends. Then we go to school. School starts at ten o'clock and we have a 1/2 hour break at 12 o'clock and finish at 4. Also we have a half-day every Friday because all Muslim people go to the Mosque to pray.

Sometimes after school everyone goes home for dinner and after, when the sun goes down, all the boys come out into the fields to play football and other games. It's nice fun every afternoon, except Saturday—because every Saturday we have a market just beside our house. It's our own market, and we also have our own chemist and a small sweet-shop.

I have two uncles, one in Bangladesh and one in England, and I also have two brothers and a sister in Bangladesh.

Once, in my primary school, we held a competition like a wrestling match, and I was in it. I had a big guy against me. I couldn't handle him at all. He was too strong for me and so big. There were a lot of people around and I didn't know what to do, I was so shy and scared.

Suddenly he jumped on my ankle and broke it! I was at home about three months. I can still remember how my ankle hurt.

In the winter time we had a big fruit garden. We grew bananas and mangoes and jackfruit, apples and lemons. Some seasons we sold them if we had a lot, or else we'd just eat them.

At Ramadan my parents used to fast until 2:30 p.m. to 9:00 a.m. I used to fast some time if I could, but I couldn't very much. I got too hungry. My parents slept most of the time to use the time up. I used to get some mangoes and jackfruit for them and wash it for them. Ramadan lasts one month. After Ramadan we celebrate. The day we celebrate is called EID. On that day we get new clothes and extra food and we go to our cousins' and friends' houses and have nice fun. On that day we can do anything we want to do.

Also every year we have a big market and we call it "Mala." Everybody goes. They have nice toys and music and a magic show. We enjoyed Mala a lot.

Another day, before the summer holiday, we had a sports day. We played badminton, volleyball, cricket and throwing heavy stones. There was so many people in the field. I was playing badminton. We had great fun.

This was the "corrected" version of Mashud's work, but basically the words were Mashud's: that is to say, he had essentially put down these words in this order. Susan's corrections had been almost exclusively cosmetic, focusing on spelling, grammar, and odd points of vocabulary, though there had been some impact on what we might call "style" in small, localized changes of word-order. A flavor of Mashud's original draft is given for the sake of comparison, in the following extracts:

I was bon in Banladesh and ther was a war the war strat in 1971 that year I was bon. before Bangladesh was East Pakistan then ther had big war and Pakistan sprede in three parte. one is India and alther is Bangladesh and Pakistan, I do'nt really no much about it becase i was just bor that time, my mum told me.

. . .

We had four cows. one days school close and I looking after the cows suddenle, someone come up after me and should a peece of red clouth to the cow. the cow strated chaseing me I was run the cow push me with it's horn and I when roling down the hill. I shokt and hurt pane in my chest. it tolke month to be better.

When Susan had finished reading Mashud's new draft through with him, she returned immediately to his doubts about its length:

S: Well, what else could you say?

M: (Shrugs)

S: How about something more about the things you did with your friends? The wrestling match was interesting. What other things did you do?

M: Yes, Miss.

S: Also, you haven't said anything about your life in England. You could write a bit about that: what it's like here for you.

M: Cold, Miss.

S: (Laughs) Yes . . . Cold . . . Well, you could say that. What else could you say?

M: (Shrugs)

S: Well, you think about it. Write down more bits on a separate sheet of paper and then show it to me.

Mashud seemed happy with Susan's advice. He took a sheet of paper from the teachers' desk and spent the rest of the lesson writing busily. Next lesson, he presented Susan with two more sections—her "corrected" versions of which are shown below:

1. One time, our Sunday school was closed, and I called for some friends. We decided to go hunting, for a fox for birds. So each one of us got a spear and we went through the jungle shouting, screaming and running. Our noise scared away all the foxes. If there was one, it would run. But suddenly one small fox just jumped out of a hole and ran away, and we all ran after it. We couldn't kill it, but it was good fun.

   In the winter-time in our country, it's not very cold like in England. If we have to wear a jumper, that's winter! And in winter we do a lot of fishing in the canals. Sometimes the water is pushed into our nearest field by the canals, and we can fish in it. But it's far too dangerous to go into the water and pull nets because there are too many snakes in the water. The water is too dirty as well. But we still have a good time and enjoy ourselves in the water.

2. When I was about 13 years old my dad was in England. He wrote a letter to us saying that he would try to get us to England. We were so happy to come here. After about six months he came back to Bangladesh to get us.

When we came to London we felt so cold! We went to the hotel in Bayswater. Next day my dad went to the council office to apply for a house. We stayed in the hotel for two months then we had a flat in Harrow Road. We stayed in Harrow Road for about 2 1/2 years. Then we bought a house with a nice garden in Kilburn.

Susan's task now was to discuss the two new sections with Mashud and to get him thinking about how to incorporate them into the original text. The rest of the class were busily involved with their own writing at this point, and I was once again able to sit in on Susan's and Mashud's conversation:

S: That's really excellent, Mashud. Very good. Do you think this is long enough now?

M: Miss . . . (Tone implies "Yes.")

S: So all you've got to do now is add these bits . . . But . . . Don't just put them on the end. In this kind of writing, it's best to put things together . . .

M: Miss?

S: (Partly to herself, partly to Mashud, partly to me) Mmm . . . It's so hard to explain . . . Look . . . (Pointing to Mashud's work) Here . . . The War . . . Here . . . Your home . . . Here, you and your friends playing . . . Here, Ramadan . . . Now . . . these new bits . . . You and your friends playing . . . Put that in here. (Draws arrows on Mashud's second draft, indicating this section should go after "a small sweetshop").

M: (Pointing to the second new piece) This, Miss?

S: Er . . .

M: Here, Miss! (Pointing to the end of the original version.)

S: Yes. Good. Put that bit at the end. It actually goes there quite nicely, doesn't it. Good. Well done.

Mashud returned to his work. A few days later, he had finished it. Susan happened to be off school that day, and Mashud asked me to go over his completed third draft with him. This I gladly agreed to do.

The new section (labelled 1, above), on playing with his friends (hunting for animals and birds, and fishing) appeared, as Susan had suggested, with the other references to play: tucked in between the paragraph about playing in the fields and the paragraph about the wrestling match. The other new material (labelled 2, above), about life in England, also appeared where Mashud himself had suggested: at the end of his completed script. What fascinated me, however, was that Mashud had independently made two further organizational alterations entirely off his own bat. First, he had removed the short paragraph "I have two uncles . . . Bangladesh" from its original location (i.e., surrounded by paragraphs dealing with recreational activities with his peers), and replaced it at the end of the script after "Then we bought a house with a nice garden in Kilburn." (Neither Susan nor myself had commented on, or, I suspect, even noticed the "inappropriate" placing of this paragraph when the suggestion was made to insert part of Mashud's new material here.) Second, he had shifted the short paragraph that appeared at the end of his second draft—"Another day . . . we had great fun"—to a new position just after the paragraph about the wrestling match.

Most of my next meeting with Susan was spent discussing Mashud's finished autobiography (a remarkable piece of writing made to appear even more remarkable by the halting, embarrassed English of his oral exchanges) to see what we might learn from it to take with us into subsequent lessons. In addition to observing a number of techniques transferred and developed from his moral stories (for instance, the ability to recount a narrative in a very vivid way) we also found what seemed to us to be new techniques. These included the evaluation of experience, the adoption of a conversational voice, and the use of redrafting skills of a far more complex nature than Mashud had ever shown us before.

The appearance of these new redrafting skills we found particularly exciting, not least because we felt they would have a cross-curricular impact. (Originally we had been concerned with initiating Mashud into certain favored Western European forms of expressive writing, but clearly there were aspects of these forms that occurred also in other forms of writing that he might expect to encounter elsewhere in the curriculum.) Essentially, these redrafting skills were to do with the organization of written material in ways that related to perceptions of similarity (an essential ingredient of the subordinative modes of representation) rather than to their location in "real time" (an essential ingredient of the aggregative model of representation). It may well have been that Mashud's playing of badminton, volleyball, and cricket, and throwing of heavy stones had occurred at the end of his period in Bangladesh (subsequent questioning revealed that indeed they did); however, in his newest draft the account was located with other recreational activities, now all gathered together in a single section of the composition. Similarly, Mashud's reference to uncles and siblings may originally have seemed more appropriate adjacent to talk of "our house" and "our own market"; but on second thought it clearly seems to him to go better with the

mention of his father's coming to England and returning for some of his family a little later.

This is not to suggest, of course, that Mashud had no previous grasp at all of these important skills (important matters, that is, of variable representational etiquette), or that many monolingual anglophones do not also reveal a tendency to write sometimes in additive rather than in subordinative ways. All the evidence of Mashud's previous writing, however, suggested that the subordinative style of writing "own" stories so favored in Western European schools and cultures was one in which he had not previously received extensive instruction; also that through suitable relationships and discourse with his English teachers he was now beginning to understand and to acquire those styles within a teaching and learning framework that did not question or undermine any previously or concurrently held notions of appropriateness of either content or representation.

It was this kind of sensitivity, we felt, this awareness and interest in linguistic diversity that stretched far beyond matters of grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and calligraphy, that was still all too lacking in the education of many bilingual learners, and that notions of dichotomies between academic and social language, leading to the "decontextualized" instruction of the former, had done little to encourage. That is not to say that our teaching of Mashud was a model of excellence, of course, and certainly neither of us perceived it as such then or subsequently. Nor had we come up with any startling, new "answers" to a perceived "problem." All we had done was to exercise our care and judgment, first in *selecting* an appropriate task, then in *handling* it in ways that were sensitive to our pupil's personal history. If we had worries about the handling—and we certainly did—they were to do with the amount and kind of teacher intervention that had remained even after our decision to devolve greater responsibility for the project on to Mashud. Susan, benefiting from hindsight, became critical of her copious surface-corrections of Mashud's early drafts, considering herself "lucky not to have put the poor lad off altogether . . . Thinking about it now, it might easily have destroyed his confidence utterly"; while I was also concerned about our imposition of length-limits on the piece of work: though Mashud himself had said the original version was "too short," it had been Susan and myself who had first broached this idea, effectively preventing him from deciding for himself, and setting up a discourse in which length was *our* concern rather than his. Finally, because of the communication problems that existed between ourselves and Mashud, no real *explanation* had been given as to why his original piece ought to be rejigged. (His subsequent redrafting suggested he had understood what Susan was wanting him to do, but there had been no explicit assurance that his original version had not been "wrong" or that the changes he was being asked to make would not somehow render his work universally "right.") Having said that, there was no doubt in either of our minds that clear gains had been made by Mashud in the course of the project, and that in some not always clearly definable ways our change of pedagogical style had been partly instrumental in bringing these about.

What were those gains? And how *had* they come about? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary briefly to consider two others: What happened to the final draft of Mashud's autobiography? And how did this affect his subsequent writing?

As soon as Mashud's final draft had been completed, it was disseminated in a number of ways:

First, it was typed up and a copy pinned to the classroom wall as part of a larger display of the class's autobiographical writings.

Second, it was included in a collection of the class's autobiographies, itself used as a reading resource *for* the class.

Third, Mashud's final handwritten draft, along with a typed copy, was placed in a folder of his work on which, at the end of the following year, his English abilities would be assessed on a national basis.

Fourth, it happened that Mashud's Head of Year came into the class one day (as she often did, at our invitation), saw Mashud's autobiography, and asked him if she might read it out, along with one or two others, at a fourth-year assembly. Mashud was happy to agree to this, and gained much kudos from the event when it happened.

Fifth, and finally, a copy of Mashud's autobiography was sent (along with copies of all the other pupils' autobiographies) to the school in the United States with whom we had been undertaking our writing exchange. Though there has been little room in this present essay to give anything like a full account of this macro-project, its impact was an important factor in the development of Mashud's writing, which I would not want to appear to underestimate. Having an audience of unseen peers—students who would not necessarily share his English peers' preconceptions either about his background or about his capabilities—undoubtedly acted as a spur and an inspiration. He was keen to impress these unseen students, and his keenness certainly sharpened his appetite for seeking out—and acting upon—his teachers' expert advice. Without this particular variable, his progress may well have been slower or less striking than it was, though I believe it still would have been eminently observable.

I do not, finally, want to appear to make excessive claims for Mashud's development, or, for that matter, on behalf of Susan and myself. Our approach to working with Mashud and our other bilingual pupils had not, as I have indicated, thrown up any "secret formula" or really required anything more than a shift of perspective and a corresponding heightened sensitivity towards Mashud as a person with a history. Nor were all the bilingual pupils in the class as receptive as Mashud to our tactics. Two outcomes, however, are indisputable: first, even with

less receptive pupils the same kind of strategies proved very effective (I have plenty of less spectacular examples of pupils making significant gains in confidence and fluency through variations of these same approaches); second, Mashud's completion of the autobiography project represented something of a watershed in his writing development in English. We noticed in subsequent work a number of significant changes in his approach to his work, of which the following were probably the most striking:

(1) attempting the form as well as the content of every written assignment, instead of trying to "squeeze" it into an existing model (i.e., the moral tale);

(2) allowing and inviting monolingual English peers to read early and subsequent drafts of his work, and accepting and working on their comments and "corrections" (previously, he had only shown his work to other Sylheti-speaking pupils in the class);

(3) substantially altering early drafts both by reshaping and by making significant additions and removals.

We felt that these changes were all vitally important in Mashud's development as an English-literate writer, and that they had their roots in what had happened in the autobiography project, both in the nature of the project itself and in our—and particularly Susan's (though she would never admit to it) mediation of it. Having some knowledge of Mashud's previous language work in the school, where the emphasis had been on grammar, vocabulary, handwriting, and spelling, we had adopted an approach which saw our task as initiating Mashud into certain discursive practices, some of which would be less familiar to him than others (that is, in looking at projects in terms of whole discourses and utterances rather than of discrete collections of aspects) and selected as appropriate pedagogy techniques of discussion, suggestion, and encouragement to experimentation. We hope, and believe, that the final draft of Mashud's Life Story offers sufficient proof that the ingredients of our admittedly ad-hoc pudding were good.

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